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Study of
Browning's
Sauls by
Cora M. McDonald

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**A S T U D Y O F
BROWNING'S SAUL**

A STUDY OF BROWNING'S SAUL

BY

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CHICAGO

“See the Christ Stand!”

SAUL

I

Said Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell,
ere thou speak, ·
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it,
and did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy
countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from
his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King
liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the
water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of
three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer
nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their
strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks
back upon life.

II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child,
with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living
and blue

Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no
wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on
my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent
was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I
stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all
withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my
way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once
more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not
afraid
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no
voice replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon
I descried
A something more black than the blackness—the
vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow
into sight

Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof,
showed Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms
stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the center, that goes
to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught
in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily
hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance
come
With the springtime—so agonized Saul, drear and
stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine
round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noon-tide—
those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as,
one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be
done.

They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo,
they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the
stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so
far!

VI

—Then the tune for which quails on the cornland
will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crick-
ets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another; and then,
what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand
house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird
and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love
and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one
family here.

VII

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their
wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship,
and great hearts expand

And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—
And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey—
“Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are
balm-seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left such as he
on the bier.
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!”—And
then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next,
she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And
then, the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress
an arch
Naught can break; who shall harm them, our
friends?—Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory
enthroned.
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul
groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and
listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and
sparkles 'gan dart

From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once
with a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous
at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung
there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it
unchecked,
As I sang,—

IX

“Oh, our manhood’s prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing, nor sinew un-
braced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock
up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the
cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool’s living water, the hunt of
the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his
lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold
dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full
draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bul-
rushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly
and well.

How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to
employ

All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose
sword thou didst guard

When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for
glorious reward?

Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held
up as men sung

The low song of the nearly departed, and hear her
faint tongue

Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one
more attest,

I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and
all was for best'?

Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph,
not much, but the rest.

And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the
working whence grew

Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the
spirit strained true:

And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of
wonder and hope,

Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the
eye's scope,—


Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is
thine;

And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one
head combine!

On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and
rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor and lets the
gold go),
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame
crowning them,—all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King
Saul!”

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand,
harp, and voice,
Each lifting Saul’s name out of sorrow, each bidding
rejoice
Saul’s fame in the light it was made for—as when,
dare I say,
The Lord’s army, in rapture of service, strains
through its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—“Saul!” cried
I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then
Saul, who hung propped
By the tent’s cross-support in the center, was struck
by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring’s arrowy summons goes
right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that
held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on
a broad bust of stone



A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—
leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down
to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet,
your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages
untold—
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all
hail, there they are!
—Now again to be softened with verdure, again
hold the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the
green on his crest
For their food in the ardors of summer. One long
shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and
was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released
and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse,
'twixt hope and despair;
Death was past, life not come: so he waited.
Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant
forthwith to remand

To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas
Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was
hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch
from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean—a sun's slow
decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap
and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so,
arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next
should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him?—Song
filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that
it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty:
beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten
the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the
cup they put by?

He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets
me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when
round me the sheep
Fed in silence—above, the one eagle wheeled slow
as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that
might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt
the hill and the sky:
And I laughed—"Since my days are ordained to be
passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains
and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image
the show
Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly
shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
courage that gains,
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for."
And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so,
once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

XIII

“Yea, my King,”

I began—“thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts
that spring

From the mere mortal life held in common by man
and by brute:

In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul
it bears fruit.

Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how its
stem trembled first

Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then
safely outburst

The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when
these, too, in turn

Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect:
yet more was to learn,

E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.

Our dates shall we slight,

When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or
care for the plight

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced
them? Not so! stem and branch

Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the
palm-wine shall staunch

Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee
such wine.

Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit
be thine!

By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou
still shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life
of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each
deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en
as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil
him, though tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must
everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each
ray of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over,
shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till
they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South
and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of.
Carouse in the past!
But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at
last:
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at
her height,
So with man—so his power and his beauty forever
take flight.

No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look
forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin
with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his
tomb—bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till,
built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers:
whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record
shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was
Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace
chid,—
For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there!
Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon
they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise,
and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,—the
statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The
river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when
prophet-winds rave:

So the pen gives unborn generations their due and
their part

In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God
that thou art!"

XIV

And behold while I sang . . . but O Thou who
didst grant me that day,

And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to
essay,

Carry on and complete an adventure,—my shield
and my sword

In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy
word was my word,—

Still be with me, who then at the summit of human
endeavor

And scaling the highest man's thought could, gazed
hopeless as ever

On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty
to save,

Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—God's
throne from man's grave!

Let me tell out my tale to its ending—my voice to
my heart

Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last
night I took part,

As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with
my sheep,

And still fear lest the terrible glory vanish like sleep!

For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron
upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and
Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV

I say then,—my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever
more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him—he slowly
resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right-
hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted
the swathes
Of his turban, and see—the huge sweat that his
countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his
loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the
clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,—ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and
still, though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same,
God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never
quite lose.

So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed by the
pile
Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he leaned
there awhile,
And sat out my singing,—one arm round the tent-
prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack—till I
touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man
patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then
first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his
vast knees,
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like
oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up
to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke
not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it
with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow:
thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my
head, with kind power—
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a
flower.

Thus held he me there with his great eyes that
scrutinized mine—
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where
was the sign?
I yearned—"Could I help thee, my father, invent-
ing a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future
and this;
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages
hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's
heart to dispense!"

XVI

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more—no
song more! outbroke—

XVII

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw
and I spoke:
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received
in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of his handwork—re-
turned him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I
saw:
I report, as a man may of God's work—all's love,
yet all's law.

Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each
faculty tasked
To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-
drop was asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wis-
dom laid bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to
the Infinite Care!
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and
no less,
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is
seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul,
and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever
renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending
upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's
all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.
Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity
known,
I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of
my own.
There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hood-
wink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)

Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I
 worst
E'en the Giver in one gift.—Behold, I could love if
 I durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may
 o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain
 for love's sake.
—What, my soul? see thus far and no farther?
 when doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the
 hundredth appall?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the
 greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate
 gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it?
 Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end,
 what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this
 man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet
 alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will,
 much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvel-
 ous dower

Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make
such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering
the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears
attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give
one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain
at the height
This perfection,—succeed with life's day-spring,
death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the
mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,—and bid
him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find
himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new
harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—
or endure!
The man taught enough, by life's dream, of the rest
to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified
bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the
struggles in this.

XVIII

"I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:

In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.

From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:

I will?—the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth

To look that, even that in the face, too? Why is it I dare

Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?

This:—'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!

See the King—I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,

To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would—knowing which,

I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, utter-
most crown—
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor
down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no
breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
with death!
As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being
Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest
shall stand the most weak.
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my
flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like
to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!"

XIX

I know not too well how I found my way home in
the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and
to right,

Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the
aware:

I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,

As a runner beset by the populace famished for news —
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell
loosed with her crews;

And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled
and shot

Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but
I fainted not,

For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported,
suppressed

All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy
behest,

Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth
sank to rest.

Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from
earth—

Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender
birth;

In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the
hills;

In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden
wind-thrills;

In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with
eye sidling still

Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds
stiff and chill

That rose heavily, as I approached them, made
stupid with awe;

E'en the serpent that slid away silent,—he felt the
new law.

The same stared in the white humid faces unturned
by the flowers;

The same worked in the heart of the cedar and
moved the vine-bowers;

And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persist-
ent and low,

With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—"E'en
so, it is so!"

A STUDY OF BROWNING'S SAUL

This poem is a fine illustration of the power of genius over materials, of the way in which an active intellect works.

Browning read in Shakespeare's "The Tempest" the "aside" of Caliban,

"I must obey; his art is of such power,
It would control my dam's god, Setebos,
And make a vassal of him,"

and, seizing upon the thought contained in the words "my dam's god, Setebos," he conceived his wonderful poem, "Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island."

He read in "King Lear" the line of Edgar's song, "Child Rowland to the dark tower came," and amplified it into the realistic imagery of "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," a picture of constancy to an ideal.

A short sentence, a phrase, even a word may be a hint sufficient for the inspiration of genius, which sees within the little, the commonplace, the unimportant, a seed-thought capable of marvelous development.

Browning read, as we all have many times, 1 Sam. xvi. 10-23. On this foundation he constructed "Saul," one of his most famous masterpieces, if not his greatest, one of the grandest poems of the century. The first nine sections were published under the same name in No. VII. of a series of poems, entitled "Bells and Pomegranates," in 1845. They were enlarged by the addition of ten sections, and published in another series called "Men and Women," in 1855.

How much of the base of this poem did Browning take from the Bible? It is evident that the description of David, in section II., "God's child with his dew on thy gracious gold hair," is drawn from verse 7 of Samuel, though there is far less stress placed by the poet upon the physical beauty of David than is found in the Bible. Sections I., III., and IV. are true to the sacred record in representing Saul as possessed by an evil spirit, while the sections from V. to XVI. are likewise faithful in picturing David as ministering to Saul by means of his harp. But with this resemblance the comparison ends. The limited statements of scripture have been so skillfully combined with original ideas as to form a perfect harmony of truth and beauty.

It is interesting and profitable to trace an

author's use of his materials. One of the best ways to study Shakespeare is to examine carefully his sources, then to note what from these sources is in the play and what is left out. What in the play is not suggested in the source. Find reasons for the selection, for the omission, and for the addition. We shall thus see how genius reveals the significance of the commonplace, how keen and active are its mental and spiritual senses.

David played. The Bible says nothing of the tunes or the songs, but Browning heard them all. The Bible states that "Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him," but there is not a hint as to David's feeling for Saul. The poet tells us *how* Saul was revived, *how* David felt.

George Eliot, while walking one day, saw a weaver, stooped, pale, and sad, carrying a bundle. What made him look so? she asked herself. What could save and restore him? Could a little child do so much? The weaver became to her a living character, and her vision of him produced "Silas Marner."

Frances Hodgson Burnett, in her youth, met a young girl whose face haunted her until she created "That Lass o' Lowrie's."

Thus, by the alchemy of mind the humblest things of life may be transformed into the finished creation of the artist.

An analysis of the poem shows the following large divisions:

A. The preparatory statement, giving the arrival of David, the condition of Saul, David's approach to Saul. I.-IV.

B. The tunes and the songs, their effect on Saul. V.-XV.

C. David's final statement, setting forth the revelation of God's love to him. XVI.-XIX.

D. David's experience on leaving the tent. XIX.

Consider the artist's sense of proportion in the use of his materials. It is here that the skill of the great novelist is displayed. We feel the charm of the story in its progress, but do not know one of the secrets of its fascination until we have looked into the distribution of pages and chapters, into the author's "economy of means."

In this analysis we see that the preparatory statement is briefly made because it is comparatively unimportant. The second division is very long; it represents the conflict, the development of action in the poem. The final statement is

comparatively brief, growing out of the second division; and David's experience on the homeward way is still more briefly related, requiring only section XIX.

Who was Saul? In answering this question, we are reminded of the importance of a knowledge of the Bible as a foundation for the study of English literature. The Bible and the literature of the Greeks and the Romans have been described by Professor R. G. Moulton as "our ancestral literature, the mines out of which our ancestors have drawn, the currency by which modern literature transacts itself." It is not, however, necessary to become familiar with the classic literature of Greece and Rome through the Greek and the Latin languages. Only the few are able to read the Bible in Hebrew or Greek. We know it through translation, and as it thus has become power to us, so may the other branches of our ancestral literature through translation prepare us to appreciate modern literature.

Saul was the first king of Israel, a son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin. He was anointed king by Samuel. He fought with great success against the enemies of Israel, and governed well in the earlier part of his reign, but

afterwards became wicked, committed great cruelties, and fell, together with three of his sons, in the battle of Mount Gilboa against the Philistines, about 1055 B. C. At the time indicated in the poem Saul had been disobedient to divine command, stubborn, and rebellious; he had been reproved by Samuel and rejected by God. David, the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, had been anointed king by Samuel, to succeed Saul. "The spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward"; "But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." He became a wreck, a ruin. We can easily imagine that ever since his final separation from Samuel he had had strange attacks of melancholy madness, which to his servants seemed possession by an evil spirit. Samuel had been to him the means of communication with God and the source of divine blessing.

Anna M. Stoddart, in a Browning Society paper, writes: "Left to himself, Saul, whose headstrong pride was complicated with an invincible faith in God and a sense of his sovereignty, suffered awful relapses into despair. He endured, as a fallen angel might have done, the agonies of a helplessness at which his pride

rebelled, but which his faith brought home to him." She reminds us that the Jews had no middle course, that they were either safe in the hands of God or wrecked in their own. Saul had made his choice and was wrecked.

The power of music was understood at that early day. David was noted for cunning in playing. The servants of Saul had persuaded him to send to Jesse for "thy son which is with the sheep." Thus David had stood before the King, had found favor in his sight, had played upon the harp, and had caused the evil spirit to depart for the time.

The poem is dramatic narrative, characterized by a play of imagination and passion that places it in the class of dramatic lyrics. Dr. Oscar L. Triggs maintains that Browning has contributed to poetry three things, a new personality, a new method, and a new philosophy; that his method has three unique features, the form of the dramatic monologue, the method of idealism, and the principle of correspondency. He shows how Browning's monologists differ from those of any other poet by adding an environment, a scenic background, outlining against it their own plot and character, and suggesting the composition of still other personages caught in the situation.

His principle of correspondency makes the content of the poem determine its form. Therefore Browning has as many forms or molds of expression as he has characters and poems. Roughness, ruggedness, double and grotesque rhymes, are in harmony with the subject embodied. "Caliban upon Setebos," "The Grammarian's Funeral," and the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" are excellent illustrations. "Saul" is comparatively simple and perfect in expression, regular, musical, exquisitely beautiful, because the content is noble and attractive in the highest degree.

A. The preparatory statement, giving the arrival of David, the condition of Saul David's approach to Saul. I.-IV.

The poem opens with the arrival of David in response to a special messenger from the king. Observe that Browning represents David as the speaker, telling over, early in the morning, alone with his sheep by the brook Kidron, the wonderful experience that came to him on the afternoon and evening of the day before.

Abner, Saul's first cousin, and the commander-in-chief of his army, greets David with a gladness and a hope which his coming has brought to hearts in the depths of anxiety and

fear. From section I. we learn that for three days and three nights Saul had remained alone in the black silence of the mid-tent of his royal pavilion, not a sound escaping to tell of the agony within, and that his servants would neither eat nor drink until they knew that their king was alive.

Mark the rare beauty of expression of section II. The loveliness of the youthful David inspires Abner with the thrill of expectancy.

The alliteration of *g* in the second line is forceful, and it would be difficult to find a more pleasing choice of adjectives than "gracious, gold." David rises before us, "a slender youth, quick of movement, hair of reddish gold, face and form of magnetic gentleness and tenderness." The "lilies still living and blue" impart to us an atmosphere of purity and coolness. When David started on his mission to Saul at Elah, "he had plucked, by the waters of Kidron, a handful of blue irises, and twined their broad leaves round the strings of his harp, to shield them from the fierce heat of his journey over that desolate region where the sterile hills lie exposed to the glare of noon, and the very stones and sand of the valleys are so scorched that part of it is known as the 'Valley of Fire.' "

In section III. David relates how, first, he knelt to the God of his fathers, then ran o'er the hot sand, stooped under the outer enclosure of the mid-tent, groped on hands and knees to the second enclosure, prayed again, "and opened the fold-skirts and entered and was not afraid." No voice replied to his gentle announcement, "Here is David, thy servant!" Saul was lost to sense. When David's eyes, dazzled by the glare of the afternoon sun, became gradually accustomed to the darkness, he descried the huge main prop, with its cross-beam supporting the pavilion, then slowly to his sight appeared a figure against it, then a sunbeam suddenly falling upon it through the tent roof revealed to him Saul.

Section IV. completes the first topic of the outline and presents a remarkable picture of Saul. Mark the nobility and appropriateness of the simile. Saul in his tent is like the king-serpent, caught in his pangs, hanging heavily in the pine, away from his kind, waiting for his change which shall come with the springtime.

In our study of literature we should question the figure of speech. What does the figure bring to the idea? Does it degrade or ennoble its subject? In the present case we wish to

dignify Saul even in his wretchedness. What power, greatness, loneliness, agony, possible deliverance, in this picture of the king-serpent; what strength in the accumulation of epithets, "drear and stark, blind and dumb!" Try to see everything that is contained in a piece of literature. There is no better practice than to state aloud without the text every detail in a selection; as, for example, every detail in the narration before David went into the tent, every detail in the description of Saul. This becomes a more and more difficult task as the poem proceeds.

B. The tunes and the songs, their effect on Saul. V.-XV.

Section V. opens the main action. David took his harp, untwined the lilies, and began to play. George Willis Cooke says, in his "Browning Guide-Book," that David presents three series of motives to Saul. each series rising higher than the preceding.

I. Tunes played to the brutes.

1. To the sheep, in V.
2. To the quail, in VI.
3. To the crickets, in VI.
4. To the jerboa, in VI.

II. The help-tunes of the great epochs in human life.

1. Reapers, in VII.
2. Burial, in VII.
3. Marriage, in VII.
4. Soldiers, in VII.
5. Priests, in VII.

III. Songs of human aspiration.

1. The wild joys of living, in IX.
2. The fame crowning ambition and deeds, in IX.
3. The praise of unborn generations, in XIII.
4. The next world's reward and repose, in XVII.
5. The love which is the Christ, in XVIII.

A general list of eleven might be made as follows:

I. Animal tunes.

1. The folding tune, in V.
2. The quail tune, in VI.
3. The cricket tune, in VI.
4. The jerboa tune, in VI.

II. Human tunes.

5. The reaper's tune, in VII.
6. The funeral tune, in VII.

7. The marriage tune, in VII.
8. The friendship tune, in VII.
9. The Levite chant, in VII.
- III. Harp and voice.
 10. Song of Saul's life before he was king, in IX. and X.
 11. Song of Saul's future glory, in XIII., XVII., XVIII.

Another classification may be made on the principle of the effect of these tunes and songs upon Saul, giving three classes:

- I. The animal and the human tunes, V.-IX.
Saul groaned, he shuddered.
- II. The song of Saul's life before he was king, IX.
Saul was struck by his name, was left standing, released, and aware.
- III. The song of Saul's future glory, XIII.
Saul sat, observed and caressed David, recognizing his beauty, his sweetness, and his love.

Tracing the steps in Saul's return to conscious life, exercising the thought that leads to individual discovery, is another excellent means of mental training. Laboratory work is no longer confined to instruction in science, but is

now a special feature in the teaching of literature, and such original investigation as this poem offers may be regarded as one phase of English laboratory work. The pouring-in process, the phonograph process, is happily passing from all departments of instruction.

Let us return to section V. for the consideration of the action and its expression.

David first played the tune used at the sheep-folding. Is Browning's picture of the sheep a true one? Could the shepherd play a tune that would bring them one by one to the pen-door? How beautiful they are, clean, sweet, whole, because they have fed "where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed." Do sheep follow one after another,

"As star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us—so blue and so
far"?

Is the simile of the star a good one? Was it natural for David to associate the sheep with the stars? This tune should affect Saul because he was a shepherd before he was a warrior.

The jerboa is a small jumping rodent, or jumping hare, "half bird and half mouse," Browning says.

The last lines of section VI.,

“God made all the creatures and gave them our love
and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one
family here,”

reflect the spirit of our age, not that of David's time, love for animals and respect for their rights. This feeling toward lower animate life is one of the characteristics of the romantic movement of our century, and is well represented by the poets Burns, Cowper, Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Shelley carried the sentiment so far as to become a vegetarian. The new spirit has given us our present interest in animal life and our protection of it.

Finding Saul unmoved, David left the tunes that “touch and please the creatures of the pasture lands,” and turned to the help-tunes of the great epochs in human life. First, the glad wine-song of the reapers, their joy and their fellowship in labor; then the last song for the dead; the happy chant of the marriage; and the great march of men united in building for service or defense. Is there a historical foundation for this music? In Isaiah xvi. 9, 10, and in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, we have references to songs of reapers and songs of lamentation. In answer to this

question, Rabbi Charles Fleischer, of Boston, said: "I believe that David's songs in Browning's poem 'Saul' are the inspired melodies of our nineteenth-century David rather than the songs of Israel's poetic shepherd king. While, then, I believe that these melodies were not current among the Jews of old, I know that they would serve well to express beliefs and ideals characteristic of the best minds among the Jews to-day."

These strains of elemental pleasure, of human companionship, happiness, and love, with all their appeal to memory and to emotion, failed to rouse the king from his death-like lethargy. Once more the harp was tuned, now to the deeper strain of worship, to the grand processional chorus of the Levites as they went up "to the altar in glory enthroned." But David's harp ceased quickly, "for here in the darkness Saul groaned," while the tent shook with the shudder that passed through the frame of this mighty man.

Were the songs cumulative in their effect upon Saul, only the chant of the Levites being needed to complete the silent influence of those preceding it? Or was it the power of religion, the strength of the religious associations of a

lifetime centered in this sacred chorus, making him realize his broken communion with God, the awful contrast between his former self and his present condition? The influence which so painfully affected the spirit of Saul was doubtless the result both of the cumulative power of the melodies, and the sacred nature of the chant of the Levites, which, linked it to the most precious things of his life in the past.

Note the language of section VIII., the marvelous description of jewels, "lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart." Browning resembled George Eliot in his love for jewels. It is said of her that she preferred precious stones to flowers, so great was her pleasure in the play of colors.

But only Saul's head moved, his body still hung erect in its suffering. He had been reached, yet only reached. So David bent again to the harp. Now Saul, and Saul alone, filled his mind and inspired a song—not the failure before him, but the ideal Saul in the years of his early manhood. Section IX. contains the words of the song, a tribute to physical life and to the perfection of Saul's development through nature, happy family relations, and national greatness, that for thought, for force and artistic

beauty of expression grows more impressive and delightful the more familiar we are with it. The first twelve lines should be thoroughly memorized by us all and often repeated. They will serve as a tonic for physical weakness. We should expect such lines from a poet who was distinguished for magnificent physique, health, vigor of body and mind, massive breadth of character, courage, cheerfulness, optimism, love of nature and of art, joy in fellowship with every living thing.

One of the most hopeful signs of to-day is our growing appreciation of man's body, and our consequent effort to raise it to the perfection of all its powers. The delicate, fainting maid is giving place in life and in literature to the nut-brown maid; the feeble scholar, his brow sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, is receding from ministerial and student life. A professor wittily remarked that now only the unusually pressed or the unusually dull burn midnight oil. Many students have heretofore been defrauded in matters of health. Until recently section IX. could have been applicable to young men only, not to young women. Let us strive to extend the influence of the spirit of these lines. Do we feel the thrill of the physical life they picture?

Have we lived or visited where the description is appropriate in its details?

David sets forth three kinds of good in this song: physical life, life in the family, life in the nation. Saul has reached the highest attainment in each of these. Love, and even human sorrow, in the home life, work, friendship, ambition, great deeds, have contributed to the development of this boyhood of wonder and hope, until at last, crowned by fame, all gifts have been

“Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—
King Saul!”

The closing lines of this section, as published in “Bells and Pomegranates” in 1845, are as follows:

“On one head the joy and the pride, even rage like
the throe
That opes the rock, helps its glad labor, and lets
the gold go—
And ambition that sees a man lead it—oh, all of
these—all
Combine to unite in one creature—Saul!”

The words, “like the throe,” etc., explain the meaning of “rage.” David has just spoken of beauty and love, and now puts rage in the same category, offering his explanation on the instant.

Gold is usually found in cracks of the rock that has been rent asunder by throes or convulsions of nature; and as the rending "opes the rock, helps its glad labor, and lets the gold go," so the best of life is frequently revealed by disruptive forces. This is Browning's common doctrine of evil.

It seems at first thought incredible to us that Browning should ever have ended the poem here. It is said that when he thus closed it he meant us to suppose Saul free, that the glory of his past record was enough to restore him and to inspire him in the future. In the ten years following the first publication, Browning lived and rounded out human experience, and in the new light of this life and experience he doubtless composed the fuller song. Keep the thought in mind when you read the poem, and see if you cannot feel this reason for the addition.

Section X. opens with the revelation of David's soul to us, the intensity of his desire to break the spell that bound the man, to rescue him from despair by the memory of that royal past. So intense was his spirit that it leaped through heart, hand, harp, and voice to one mighty appeal—"Saul!"—that thrilled with a long shudder the black, lifeless frame and the

tent, and left the king standing, released and conscious.

Then follows another of the forcible and beautiful figures of the poem. It is long, requiring a vigorous mind for its production, as for its appreciation. Saul is the mountain from whose breast the year's weight of snow has at last suddenly fallen under the rays of the returning sun; David in his beauty is the springtime, softening that mountain for the nest of the bird and the feet of the goat with its young. The figure is perfect in application. As the breast-plate of snow long seems to withstand the gentle yet increasing warmth of the golden rays directed toward it, but finally is loosened and comes thundering down to the base, so Saul seemed to resist the sweet and ever stronger influence of harp and voice, yet in time was released with the convulsion of his being. He was awakened from death, but real life had not returned to him. He must be recalled to hope and activity ere the work of the singer is complete. His vacant eyes gave sign that, though he was conscious, he had no interest in the affairs of life. One could gaze at them, just as in autumn one may watch without fear of harm the pallid sun as it drops into the ocean, or as it sinks behind

a massive range of hills. The spirit was lost to the eyes, as the true nature to the sunset. We assume here that the poet had in mind two autumn sunsets. David was troubled. How could he enliven and sustain the king?

Mark the figure, "the wine of this life," and compare with "the palm-wine" of section XIII. David's song had made Saul's past yield all its beauty and strength, its full cup of wine, but this had served only to arouse, to call back to life. Saul would rather die than live. What vintage could bear wine more potent "to brighten the eye and bring blood to the lip"?

We pass to section XII. As David thus sought for nobler truth, he felt his spirit coming under the power of fancy, as in days gone by when, alone with his sheep, he mused on man and his life in the great world; and his harp responded to the higher, richer notes of section XIII. He rose from the plane of sense; Saul was right in rejecting the comforts of a merely mortal existence.

What does the palm-tree stand for? What the palm-wine? The tree represents the physical life of man, slowly developing to perfect maturity, its active work and its pleasures; the palm-wine, all the joy which comes to man

through the spiritual nature and all the good which proceeds from that nature. As the palm-tree is important only for its fruit, its wine, so Saul's life was significant only for what it yielded to himself and to the world. What is the value of the long description of the palm-tree? It symbolizes the slow development of man from childhood to maturity. David poured for him two long draughts of soul-wine: first, he could rejoice in the outcome of his own deeds, their effect upon his people; and second, he could look forward to an immortality of fame. Thus, through the spirit alone could he gain real satisfaction. As the sun looks upon nothing which his rays have not produced, so Saul might see in the flash of his own will, his passion and prowess, the germ of the radiance that filled North and South, the inspiration to the great deeds of his people, both fathers and sons. He must pass away even as do the rose and the lion, but no! the chisel and the pen will give to generations yet unborn a part in his being, and will record him the first of the mighty. Let him then thank God and take courage.

This second draught of soul-wine represents the only immortality in which George Eliot be-

lieved. She expressed her longing for it in the famous lines,

“O may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence: live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge man's search
To vaster issues.”

Professor Corson says that a cardinal idea with Browning is the regeneration of men through a personality which brings new feeling fresh from God, that the quickening, regenerating power of personality is everywhere exhibited in his poetry. Concerning the first twenty-five lines of section XIII., which exult in the immortality of Saul's deeds, he writes: “In the concluding lines is set forth what might be characterized as the apostolic succession of a great personality—the succession of those ‘who in turn fill the South and the North with the radiance his deed was the germ of.’” He further writes: “What follows in David's song gives expression to the other mode of transmitting a great personality; that is, through records that ‘give unborn generations

their due and their part in his being,' and also to what those records owe their effectiveness, and are saved from becoming a dead letter."

We must have observed in our study of the poem how fine is Browning's use of external nature, and how true he is to David's character in presenting him in close touch with that nature. How long, think you, would it require to learn all that David knew of animal and plant, of earth and sky? His knowledge of nature and his love for it are shown in Psalms xix. and xxiii.

One of the most interesting of present studies in literature is the author's use of external nature, and the comparative study of authors in this respect is specially valuable. How do the writers of the eighteenth century compare with those of the nineteenth in this matter? How do the poets differ in their attitude towards nature? Compare Chaucer, Shakespeare, Scott, Burns, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Bryant, Longfellow, and Lowell. By this means, our own observation of nature is enlarged, our love for it strengthened, and our appreciation of the novelist and the poet greatly advanced.

At section XIV. in the narration, the memory of the marvels of David's experience on the previous night, of the wonderful revelation made

to him, so overcomes him that he looks to God for his presence with him as in the past, that he may tell out the tale to its ending, his voice to his harp. He has wakened in the early dawn in a dewy covert of the valley of the brook Kidron, east of Jerusalem, not far from Bethlehem. Alone with the sheep, his soul still filled with awe, he is recalling every incident of the experience with "fear lest the terrible glory vanish like sheep."

And what was the effect upon Saul of the song of his undying fame? In section XV. we read how he slowly resumed his old motions and kingly habits, smoothed his hair, adjusted his turban, wiped the sweat of agony from his face, girded his loins as of yore, and put on his arm-lets. He is the same Saul whom God chose to be king. He sank upon the heap of garments at the base of the tent-prop, at first with one arm around the prop to support his head, the other slack at his side. As David's strains rose to the glory of Saul in all time, the king encircled him with his vast knees, and responded to his earnest look by laying his hand gently but firmly upon the youthful brow, caressing the hair, and bending back the lovely face to peruse it as one might scan the beautiful flower.

Thus face to face were the two whom God had anointed; the one whom he had rejected, the other whom he had chosen and inspired.

The line "To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose," is significant as one of the many evidences in Browning's works of his belief in the divine and eternal nature of man.

Had David failed, or succeeded, at the opening of section XVII.? As he was held in Saul's embrace, the great dark eyes of the king looking into his, his soul thrilled with even deeper love, with such intensity of love as moved his whole being in passionate desire and longing to aid and to bless beyond all that he had given. This yearning in his heart is evidence that, though he had done great things, he had not fully succeeded, had not accomplished all he sought, that he had reached the limit of the power of human love. We are reminded of the disciples when Christ came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and found them in their helplessness unable to cast out the dumb spirit from the afflicted boy. The king's present need far exceeded David's ability to serve, for though restored to himself, he was yet a wreck, his life and his bearing much spent. David's love would bestow upon Saul not only that glorious

life of the past and of the future, all that earth can yield to man, but would give "new life altogether, as good ages hence as this moment," immortal life and blessedness.

"And so, in this mood, with this divine desire, he is carried beyond harp and song into the vision and message of the prophet." God revealed to his soul the highest truth of life. See how that moment of revelation is described in the poem:

"then at the summit of human endeavor
And scaling the highest man's thought could, gazed
hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me—till, mighty
to save,
Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance—
God's throne from man's grave!"

Here David dropped the harp to use it no more in this service, giving utterance with words alone to the divine voice that spoke within him, "as if he were himself the harp of God vibrating at the touch of the Master's fingers."

What is the function of music in the poem? It is plainly used, not as an end in itself, but as a means to the exalted end in view. Rev. Professor E. Johnson, in a Browning Society paper, writes: "Browning is, in common with all poets,

both musician and painter, but much more the latter than the former. He is never for a moment the slave of his ear, if I may so express it. We know that he has, on the contrary, the mastery of music. But music helps and supports his imagination, never controls it. Music is to Browning an inarticulate revelation of the truth of the supersensual world, the 'earnest of a heaven.' He is no voluptuary in music. Music is simply the means by which the soul wings its way into the azure of spiritual theory and contemplation. 'Saul' is a magnificent interpretation of the old theme, a favorite with the mystics, that evil spirits are driven out by music. But in this interpretation it is not the mere tones, the thrumming on the harp, it is the religious movement of the intelligence, it is the truth of Divine love throbbing in every chord, which constitutes the spell."

The vision and the message of the prophetic David fill sections XVII. and XVIII.

C. David's final statement, setting forth the revelation of God's love to him. XVI.-XIX.

A careful paraphrase of section XVII. will furnish another excellent exercise.

It may be separated into two divisions, as follows:

1. David's experience up to the moment of seeing the new truth, lines 1-25.

2. The new truth, lines 26-49.

The first division may be subdivided as follows:

1. David's consciousness of his own littleness as he studies God's power, lines 1-17.

2. In the one way of love he may outstrip God, lines 18-25.

Try to state, *in the first person*, to some friend the substance of the opening twenty-five lines, and see if David's meaning is clear to that friend. This practice will aid your own understanding of them. Macaulay used to read his writings to his maid to test their clearness of expression.

David sees in himself the work of God's hand, and with the brain given him for judgment, he looks out upon the world and finds that all is pervaded by love, and yet all is governed by law. Each attempt to understand God in the least thing has but served to open unfathomable depths of wisdom and power, compared with which man's knowledge, wisdom, and forethought are as nothing. Man's work is imperfect; he can only dream of success; but when he looks upon creation, he sees that perfection everywhere, "in

the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, and the clod." Thus looking within and around him, he submits in the spirit of humility "man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete," and by this act of humility is exalted toward God.

Such is the thought of the seventeen lines, many of which lend themselves finely to quotation, as, for example,

"Each faculty tasked
To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-
drop was asked."

Tennyson doubtless had in mind an idea similar to that of this line when he wrote,

"Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but *if* I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is."

The blessedness of the grace of humility has never been more fittingly described, "that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it, too," "by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet."

Man rises superior to the beast of the field in his ability to see the greatness of God in cre-

ation. He is exalted by that act of imagination which looks through the seen to the unseen Cause. The humble pastor who, standing in the valley, lifted his hat to the distant hills, was a lofty man in spirit. An old Scotch Highlander, poor and weak, was observed to go out from his little cottage early each morning and to stand, with bonnet off, looking upward to the mountains as if in silent prayer. When questioned concerning the habit, he replied, "I worship the Father when my soul pays its tribute to the beauty of his world."

But David finds one faculty in his own soul, pleasant in its use, which he dare not exercise fully lest in its display he outstrip God, the Giver—the faculty of love. How he *could* love! But shall he so worst the Maker of all? No, not for love's sake. The argument of the twenty-five lines is practically this: When I, David, looked upon God's power in creation, my own littleness overcame me; but when I looked upon Saul, I seemed to love him more than God did.

A father by the bedside of his suffering child had David's experience. He said that when he looked up to the stars, he thought that God loved man; but when he looked at his sick child,

he could only cry out, "Why does not God love him as I do!"

It seemed to David that he surpassed the Creator in the one particular of loving, that in all the rest he was "nothing-perfect," God "all-complete."

Here David retraces his thought as if appalled at the conclusion his logic has reached. In his study of the world, the Creator was revealed to him at every step of the way, door after door of knowledge opening at his touch. God was reflected in the least as in the greatest, immanent in nature and in man. If, then, David has seen God reflected in the least things, ninety-nine doors opening to reveal him, shall the hundredth door appall him, shall he doubt that in the greatest of all things, human love, God is not even more fully reflected? He will not belittle God's love, as at first thought. Cannot the Giver here, as elsewhere, compete with the gift of his own hand? Shall the creature surpass the Creator? David yearns to do all, to give all to Saul, but he is powerless to aid him further. Suppose, for a moment, that David had created Saul, had endowed him with the marvelous life of which he has just sung, and had placed him in such a wonderful world as ours; do not his

flowing tears, the token of his love, prove that he would not forsake such a creature in ruin, but would save and redeem and restore him, crown him with immortality? Would he not at the right moment interfere with his omnipotent power and rescue Saul, bid him awake to the light of a new and a higher life? Would he not by the pain and the struggle of this life of probation prepare him to gain that higher being, and reward him with intensified bliss? If such is the desire of David the creature's soul, for its fellow-creature, a like love and a like desire, infinite in degree and linked with infinite power to fulfil, *must* exist in the heart of the Eternal. Then it is clear that God has found a way of redemption for man, and has made possible to him an immortality of ever advancing life, light, and joy.

David's reasoning is similar to Job's when, turning his back upon the false counsel of his friends, he felt that there must be in God not only the wisdom and the power which they ascribed to him, but the love and the sympathy which they practically denied to him; and as David groped his way to the light, so Job came out of the depths with the triumphant cry, "I know that my Redeemer liveth!"

George Eliot puts the same argument into the mouth of the simple-hearted, unlettered, but loving and helpful Dolly Winthrop: "But what come to me as clear as the daylight, it was when I was troubling over poor Bessy Fawkes, and it allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks, and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i' the middle o' the night—it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor what I've got—for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me, and if anything looks hard to me, its because there's things I don't know on."

Section XVIII. opens with David's glad cry of faith, "I believe it!" What is the antecedent of "it"? The proposition just reached at the close of section XVII., the general proposition of immortality, the immortality David has pictured. God is the giver of it, we the receivers of it.

"In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe."

In God's eternal existence is ours; in the fact that God has will and power to give rests our reception of the gift. "The last," that is, David, is in "the first," or God; when God

wills, David wills and acts. The converse of the statement is, that as David wills and acts, so God exists as will and conduct; then, further, as David loves, so God must be love. We have here an expression of the transcendentalism which is characteristic of Browning's thought. The "it" of the third line is, also, immortality, or the power to believe in immortality.

The word "Sabaoth" in line five is a Hebrew term meaning "hosts," or "armies," and is used in the Bible as a designation of the Almighty, an appellation of the Lord as Ruler over all. We find it preserved in Rom. ix. 29, and in James v. 4. It unites the ideas of might and glory, the angelic hosts being connected with the revelation of Sinai. The worlds, life, and nature emanate from the will of God, and they stand ever ready to execute that will. They are his Sabaoth, his hosts, his armies.

Here David contrasts his own weakness with the omnipotence of God. "Do I will at my best?" he says in effect, "How much can I accomplish? So little that the very atoms, the least of created things, would despise me." But the vision upon him fresh from God enables him to look even this seemingly hopeless fact in the face, to despair not because of this weak-

ness. Man is not exalted by what he accomplishes, but by what, with all the intensity of his being, he sincerely wills or desires to do. Not in the flesh, but in the spirit of man is the gain or the loss, the deed or the failure, the strength or the weakness. Browning has made us forever his debtors for the inspiration of the line,

“ ’tis not what man Does which exalts him, but
what man Would do!”

Observe the illustration of this principle. David wishes to help Saul, and his desire is so great that he would do all he could to attain. He would wrestle with the strength of his might if this would lift the king from sorrow; he would make himself poor if thereby he might enrich him; he would even starve his own life out if this act would build up the king; but he knows that the greatest effort, sacrifice, or suffering he could undergo may be of no avail. Yet the spirit that prompts him to do all, to give all, the spirit of full love that leads to consecration of labor for Saul, has rendered his service to the king as perfect as though he had bestowed upon him every gift his soul craved.

Love for fellowman, in its sincerity and its fulness, is perfect service. Love is the fulfilling

of the law. Though empty-handed, destitute of all things, we may yet offer to God and to man a perfect service, the devotion of supreme love. No higher truth has ever been revealed to man. Love, which is the universal principle of Browning's philosophy, is grandly illustrated in "Saul."

We are prepared for the sublime conclusion of David's inspired reasoning. Would he render such service? Would he suffer to the uttermost for love's sake? So will God. Love ineffable, glorious, supreme, infinite, shall be His highest crown, wholly filling the universe with its presence and enfolding every creature in its embrace.

"It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
with death!"

In other words, it is not an easy task to save Saul, to redeem the creature. But as God's Love is seen to be almighty, so let him prove that his power to make his creatures love him, that power which exists with Love and for its service, is also almighty. How shall He best prove such love for the creature? David gives answer for the race:

"He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest
shall stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength that I cry for! my
flesh, that I seek

In the Godhead!"

Let Him who did most, the Creator, bear most,
suffer most for us, be the Christ. Let Omnipotence become weakness, let the Godhead take upon itself the humanity of flesh. David seeks this proof of the Creator's love toward us; he seeks it, he finds it.

"O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like
to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand
like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!"

Thus does the poet represent David with inspired vision, looking forward through ten centuries to the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer. Christ is the supreme illustration of Divine Love.

Two questions are suggested by section XVIII. Could we know that God loves us if he had not shown his love in the Saviour? Would it be possible for us to love God if he

had not revealed his nature to us in Christ? The wisdom and the power of God are everywhere manifest throughout the universe. But what of his love? Does this demand revelation?

There are interpreters of this poem who believe that Browning did not limit David's vision to the Christ of Jewish prophecy. They regard David as clairvoyant, so to speak, viewing the remotest future of our race, beholding the actual Christ, the type of perfected man, the regenerative principle of humanity.

D. David's experience on leaving the tent.
XIX.

The mission of the sweet singer of Israel to Saul, is ended. He has brought him to One who is mighty to save, to God himself, who alone is sufficient for man's deepest need. He may leave him now, and return to his sheep. But he is not yet done with the marvelous. His path homeward in the night appeared to be alive, crowded with the presence of spirits eager to bear witness to the truth of the wonderful revelation. Earth and sky, heaven and hell, the whole universe, seemed in travail together until they might be delivered of the new truth. David, beset on every side like a messenger, must have fainted as he pressed his way, had

not God's hand upheld him and at last sunk the rapture of creation in quiet. He watched Nature's emotion die out in the gray of the dawn. The hills, the forests, the wind, the wild beasts and the birds, even the serpent that slid away silent, were filled with wonder, dread, and awe at the knowledge of the new law; while the flowers, the cedars, and the vines were stirred to the heart,

“And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices—‘E’en so, it is so!’ ”

And what was this new law? The Law of Love, that Love which lifted up the Son of Man, that thus He might draw all men unto Him. The section is also indicative of a cosmic love to which Walt Whitman refers in the line in his “Song of Myself,” the “kelson of the creation is love.” The entire stanza in the song is as follows:

“Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,

And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of
my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers,
and the women my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones,
elder, mullein and poke-weed."

In section XIX. we have an illustration of one of our most advanced views of nature. It reminds us of Wordsworth's thought and of his communion with the world around him. This sympathy between man and nature has been thus well set forth: "In those supreme moments when life touches its highest altitudes, as when David leaves the presence of Saul, nature seems to be on the verge of swift transformation into some spiritual medium and substance, so intensely does the soul project itself into all visible things, so alive and responsive are all visible things to the transcendent mood and revelation of the hour. In the long range of life, the material universe is seen to be plastic, and takes on the hue and form of thought, answering the soul as the body responds to the mind. Nature is vitalized by a power greater than itself; and

through the majesty of its elemental forms—its seas and mountains and continents, as well as through its finer and more ethereal aspects—its flowers, its clouds, its sunrises and sunsets—God presses upon the spirit of man; and in the hours when that spirit aspires highest and acts noblest, this vast appearance of things material is touched and spiritualized.”

Saul is a type or a picture of our race without Christ; David is a type of the world's best helpers. What are David's qualifications for service? He states two of them in section XIV. “In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word.”

- I. His soul is the servant of God.
- II. God's word is his word.
- III. He will work to the limit of his ability.
- IV. He loves supremely and longs to be a channel for God's power.

Such are the great qualities of ideal helpers. No man or woman can possess these characteristics and yet fail to be a blessing to humanity. No man can love supremely, as David did, and fail to come to a knowledge of the truth, to find God.

It would be interesting to take from the Bible,

from history, and from literature, many characters that have been helpers or that have been helped, and observe the kind of help given and received, how each gained power or received assistance. Study in this way the reclaimed people of literature, the half-saved people, the people who have been touched but not lifted.

We have experts in physics and in chemistry, who, by experiment in the laboratory, are constantly forming new combinations, separating into elements, bestowing upon men valuable and life-giving material products, and guarding them against disease and death. There is the science of the human mind and the human soul.

Our great authors, especially the novelist and the writer of such a poem as "Saul," are investigators in the hidden forces of being, experimenters in character and in action, and when read aright, open vast stores of spiritual wealth, whence we may gain experience, warning, and guidance; courage, faith, and hope; joy and inspiration.

BROWNING'S CREED, AS SUGGESTED BY HIS POETRY

- I. God is Love, eternal, universal.
- II. Christ is the revelation of Love, divine because He is pure Love.
- III. Love is the divine principle of human life, giving rise to the crises and tragedies of life.
- IV. Personality is Power, Christ the supreme personality.
- V. Dogma is rejected; divine truth is gained less through the head than through the heart.
- VI. Life is to be judged from the point of view of immortality.
- VII. Spiritual life requires struggle, progress.
- VIII. Faith in human impulse, in intuition.
- XI. Acceptance of all the turmoil of life; activity involves opposition; harmony is to be evolved from discord, perfection from failure, good from evil.

God as Love is manifest through love (goodness, morality, the opposite of hate); through knowledge (truth, intelligence, the opposite of falsehood); through beauty (the opposite of ugliness). Life is evolution from hate, falsehood, and ugliness to love, knowledge, beauty.

“But in completed man begins anew
A tendency to God.”





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